DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 366 655 TM 021 080

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TITLE	High School Seniors Look to the Future, 1972 and 1992. Statistics in Brief.
INSTITUTION	National Center for Education Statistics (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	NCES-93-473
PUB DATE	Nov 93
NOTE	6p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Academic Aspiration; Academic Education; *Career Planning; College Bound Students; College Preparation; *Educational Attainment; Employment Experience; Enrollment; Females; Futures (of Society); Graduate Study; Higher Education; High Schools; *High School Seniors; Labor Market; Life Events; Longitudinal Studies; Males; *National Surveys; Objectives; Professional Education; Sex Differences; Social Change; *Student Attitudes; Values; Vocational Education
IDENTIFIERS	National Education Longitudinal Study 1988; National Longitudinal Study High School Class 1972

ABSTRACT

In light of the many changes of the past 20 years, it may be expected that plans of high school seniors for further education may have also changed, along with the kinds of jobs they expect to have and the things they regard as important. These questions are examined through data from the National Longitudinal Study of 1972 (NLS) and the National Education Longitudinal Study in 1988 (NELS:88), the 1992 Second Follow-up. The proportion of seniors in academic or college preparatory programs was approximately the same in both years, although enrollment in the general track increased and enrollment in vocational education decreased. In 1992, there was little difference between the sexes in high school program placement. In 1992, only 5.3 of students reported that they would not attend some kind of school after high school, but in 1972, 18.9% had reported that they would not continue. Eighty-four percent in 1992 planned to go to college, compared with the 63% who planned to attend in 1972. Differences for females were dramatic, with female seniors in 1992 four times more likely to plan on graduate or professional school as in 1972. Nearly 60% in 1992 planned a professional career, compared with approximately 45% in 1972. Changes in values were most marked among women, who in 1992 espoused values closer to those traditionally held by men. One figure and three tables present data about the two populations. (SLD)

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NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS

Statistics in Brief November 1993

High School Seniors Look to the Future, 1972 and 1992

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During the past 20 years, the United States has experienced rapid social and economic change as technology and trade have reshaped America's labor market. One of the biggest of these changes has been the push for equality by women and their entrance into the workforce in large numbers. In light of these changes, we might expect high school seniors in the nineties, especially young women, to see very different futures for themselves than did the generation that preceded them. Have these changes affected the way high school seniors prepare for the future?

How have seniors' plans for further education, the kinds of jobs they expect, and the things they consider to be important in life changed in the past 20 years?

These questions can be answered using data from two surveys of high school seniors conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics: the National Longitudinal Survey of 1972 (NLS) and the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88), 1992 Second Followup.

What Kinds of Courses Were 1992 Seniors Enrolled In?

Nearly half (47.7 percent) of all 1992 seniors reported that they were in academic or college preparatory high school programs (figure 1). This was approximately the same proportion in 1992 as it was in 1972. However, enrollment in the general track increased and enrollment in vocational programs decreased between 1972 and 1992.

Gender differences in program placement that were evident in 1972 had largely disappeared by 1992.

- While the overall proportion of seniors in academic programs was unchanged from 1972, there was an increase in the proportion of females and a decrease in the proportion of males enrolled in these courses in 1992.
- In 1972, female seniors were much more likely than their male peers to be enrolled in a vocational education program. But by 1992, there was a substantial decline in the proportion of females enrolled in vocational programs so that males and females were equally likely to report being enrolled in these courses.

As a result of these changes, there was little difference between the two sexes in high school program placement in 1992.

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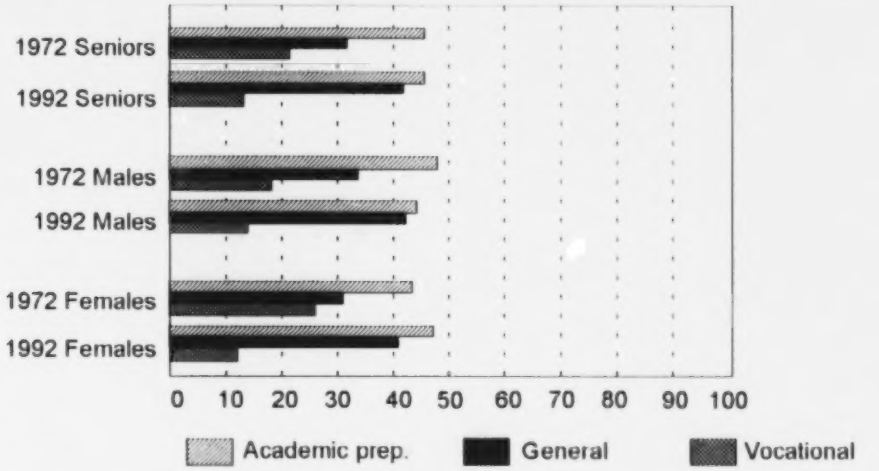
Figure 1.—Type of high school program reported: High school seniors of 1972 and 1992



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Longitudinal Study, 1972 (Base year); National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88), 1992 Second Followup.

How Much Education Do Seniors Expect To Attain?

The proportion of students who said they expected to continue their education after high school has increased since 1972 (table 1).

- In 1992, only 5.3 percent of students reported that they would not attend some kind of school after high school. Twenty years ago nearly one in five students (18.9 percent) said they would not continue their education beyond high school.
- Although only half of the 1992 seniors said they were in academic or college preparatory programs, 84 percent reported they planned to attend college. In 1972, 63 percent of the seniors indicated they planned to attend college.
- In 1972, only 12.6 percent of the seniors thought they would attend graduate or professional school. By 1992, one-third (33.3 percent) of the seniors anticipated finishing college and going on for a graduate or professional degree.

For young women, differences between the two cohorts in expectations for graduate school compared to vocational training were dramatic.

- Female high school seniors in 1992 were nearly four times more likely than female seniors in 1972 to report they expected to attend graduate or professional school.
- The proportion of young women who expected to attend vocational, trade, or business school after high school decreased by half between 1972 and 1992.

While a similar pattern is evident for males, it is less dramatic. In fact, it appears that young men's expectations for graduate school now lag behind their female peers' expectations. In 1972, men were more likely than women to expect to go to graduate school and less likely than women to believe their educations would end with high school. In 1992, the situation was reversed.

Have Seniors' Expectations for Their Careers Changed?

Nearly 6 out of 10 students in 1992 said that they would be employed in a professional occupation; this was a significant increase from 45 percent in 1972 (table 2).[1] The proportion of students who

[1] The questions asked in the two years are not identical. In 1972, seniors were asked to name "the kind of work you would like to do;" in 1992, seniors were asked to name the "occupation you expect or plan to have when you are 30 years old."

Table 1.— Percentage of high school seniors in 1972 and 1992 who expected to attend various types of postsecondary institutions, by gender

Highest level of schooling expected	All seniors		Males		Females	
	1972	1992	1972	1992	1972	1992
High school	18.9	5.3	15.5	6.7	22.2	3.9
Vocational school	18.0	10.8	17.4	11.8	18.6	9.9
College	50.4	50.6	50.8	50.4	50.1	50.8
Graduate/professional	12.6	33.3	16.3	31.1	9.1	35.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

NOTE: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Longitudinal Study, 1972 (Base Year); National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88),1992 Second Followup.

Table 2.— Percentage of high school seniors in 1972 and 1992 who expected to be employed in various occupations, by gender

Occupations	All Seniors		Males		Females	
	1972	1992	1972	1992	1972	1992
Clerical	14.2	3.5	1.9	1.2	25.5	5.7
Craftsman/trade	7.5	2.8	15.1	5.3	0.5	0.3
Farming	1.6	1.0	2.7	1.6	0.6	0.4
Homemaker	3.1	1.2	0.0	0.1	5.9	2.2
Laborer	2.5	0.8	4.9	1.4	0.3	0.1
Manager	3.1	6.0	5.1	6.6	1.3	5.4
Military	2.4	3.2	4.1	5.6	0.8	0.8
Operative	2.3	1.2	3.9	2.1	0.8	0.2
Professional	45.4	59.0	41.8	49.3	48.8	68.8
Proprietor	1.8	6.7	3.2	8.7	0.5	4.8
Protective services	2.2	4.1	4.2	6.9	0.4	1.4
Sales	3.0	1.9	2.7	2.3	3.3	1.5
Service	4.2	2.6	1.6	0.6	6.7	4.6
Technical	6.6	6.0	8.8	8.4	4.6	3.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.1	100.0	100.0

NOTE: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Longitudinal Study, 1972 (Base Year); National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88) 1992 Second Followup.

expect to be a proprietor (own their own business), to hold managerial positions, or to have careers in protective services (e.g., police or security) has also increased during this period.

Even though the vast majority of young women in both 1972 and 1992 expected to be in the labor force, the type of work young women anticipate has changed.

- In 1972, 25.5 percent of female seniors expected to be employed in clerical occupations; in 1992, only 5.7 percent said they expected to hold clerical positions.
- Twenty-years ago, less than 1 percent of women thought they would own their own businesses. In 1992, 4.8 percent reported they would be proprietors or business owners by the time they are 30.

Have Basic Values Concerning Work and Home Changed?

Values have changed during the past 20 years. Being successful in work, being able to find a steady job, having lots of money, being able to give children a better life, and living close to parents and relatives were each rated as very important by a larger proportion of 1992 seniors than by 1972 seniors (table 3).

The concern with money was also reflected in the decline in the proportion of seniors who believed that working to correct social and economic inequalities was important.

As in other areas, the changes are more pronounced among women. High school women in the 1990s see their futures very differently from those in the 1970s. High school women in the 1990s plan to seek more education than their mothers' generation and are more likely to expect to obtain professional jobs. While children and family are still very important, the current generation of young women espouse values that are increasingly similar to men's.

- Having lots of money was seen as very important by 25.9 percent of young men in 1972 and 45.3 percent in 1992. While fewer women than men placed an emphasis on money, the proportion of young women who thought it was very important tripled (9.8 percent in 1972 compared with 29.4 percent in 1992).

Table 3.— Percentage of high school seniors in 1972 and 1992 who believed each value to be "very important," by gender

	All Seniors		Males		Females	
Values	1972	1992	1972	1992	1972	1992
Being successful in work	84.5	89.3	86.2	89.0	82.8	89.6
Marrying and having happy family	81.7	79.0	78.5	75.7	84.9	82.3
Having lots of money	17.8	37.4	25.9	45.3	9.8	29.4
Having strong friendships	79.2	79.9	80.4	79.8	78.0	80.1
Being able to find steady work	77.8	87.9	82.1	87.1	73.5	88.6
Being able to give children better opportunities	66.8	75.5	66.8	74.5	66.9	76.5
Living close to parents and relatives	7.7	16.9	7.1	15.2	8.3	18.7
Working to correct social and economic inequalities	26.9	20.3	22.4	17.0	31.3	23.6

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Longitudinal Study, 1972 (Base Year); National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88) 1992 Second Followup.

- Being able to find steady work was considered very important by 73.5 percent of young women and by 82.1 percent of young men in 1972. By 1992, 88.6 percent of young women and 87.1 percent of young men reported that steady employment was very important. In fact, in 1992, young women were more likely to report that steady employment was very important than that marrying and having a happy family were very important (82.3 percent).

Are Plans and Expectations Realized?

The analysis above focuses on reported plans of high school seniors in 1972 and 1992. However, expectations are not always realized. For example, a preliminary analysis of the kinds of work members of the Class of 1972 were actually doing 14 years later in 1986 gives some interesting insights. While fewer than had expected to be in professional occupations actually were, more were proprietors or managers than had expected to be. More women than had planned to be homemakers actually were homemakers in 1986. Similar comparisons could be drawn between education expectations and actual outcomes. As the Class of 1992 is followed, analyses of their education, occupation, and other experiences can be used to explore the relationship between the plans and expectations of seniors and the actual outcomes.

Technical Notes

All estimates shown are based on samples and are subject to sampling variability. All differences noted in the text are statistically significant at the .05 level. In the design, conduct, and data processing of NCES surveys, efforts are made to minimize the effects of nonsampling errors, such as item nonresponse, measurement error, data processing error, or other systematic error. The wording of 1972 and 1992 survey items used in this brief were carefully compared and, with the exception of two items which were nearly the same (future occupation expected and highest level of education expected), the wording of all other items was virtually identical for the two cohorts.

This Statistics in Brief was prepared by Patricia Green, John Baldridge, Daniel Zahs, and Steven Ingels of the National Opinion Research Center (NORC). For further information on this Statistics in Brief contact Peggy Quinn in the Longitudinal and Household Studies Branch, National Center for Education Statistics, 555 New Jersey Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20208-5651, (202) 219-1743.